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Shakespeare's Serial Histories?

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The order of Shakespeare's history plays in the 1623 Folio involves the most substantial editorial intervention of that volume. Renaming and ordering the plays in chronological order has cast a long shadow on interpretations. This article revives interest in the history plays as individual Quarto publications, suggesting that they had narrative independence during the period.

Keywords: Histories, Serial drama, First Folio, Publishing, Reception

Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies

It is not clear what principle of organisation the compilers of *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* were using when they arranged the plays in their two classical genres. Beginning with *The Tempest* and ending with *The Winter's Tale*, the comedies do not seem to conform to any perceptible sequence – chronological, thematic, alphabetical; the tragedies are apparently similarly random in their order. Charlton Hinman's exhaustive investigations of the sequence of printing the plays in the Folio also makes clear that they often did not proceed in the order established by the catalogue, partly to accommodate copyright problems (Hinman 1963), so we cannot even claim that the plays' order is pragmatic, registering the sequence in which they were presented to the printshop for composing into lines of type. If the comedies and tragedies evade any attempt to narrativise the order in which they appear in the Folio, however, the middle genre, histories, is quite different. The editorial recategorisation of the history plays is the First Folio's most obvious, large-scale intervention into their

presentation and meaning. Order matters. In this article I argue that the Folio reordering of the history plays is a specific intervention that does not necessarily reflect reader expectation or authorial intention.

The First Folio includes on its catalogue page under the heading "Histories" ten plays. These are organised by the chronological sequence of their titular monarch. The play on the reign of King John comes first; *Henry VIII* last. In between are eight plays, titled to clarify them as a sequence: "The life and death of Richard the second", "The First part of King Henry the fourth", "The Second part of K. Henry the fourth", "The Life of King Henry the Fift", "The First part of King Henry the Sixt", "The Second part of King Hen. The Sixt", "The Third part of King Henry the Sixt", "The Life and Death of Richard the Third". The titles are syntactically equal in format, aligning their kings through parison. The content has also been standardised. History has silently become 'English history': the plays based on Roman historical material, or on ancient Britain (*King Lear*) or Scotland (*Macbeth*), are allocated elsewhere. The word "history" has stabilised into its modern meaning, leaving behind the early modern fuzziness which could produce *The Most Excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice* (1600), where "history" and "story" are synonymous. In the catalogue, the numbers, both of monarchs and of parts, are orderly and clear. Henry IV comes before Henry V who comes before Henry VI. Part one always comes before part two. Important to the appeal of the First Folio order is that it immediately seems to naturalise itself, so that any other order would seem chaotic and counterintuitive. How else could these plays be presented?

The Folio catalogue is thus the print instantiation of what has become a deeply embedded fiction about Shakespeare's history plays: that they make narrative, political and theatrical sense as a collected sweep rather than as individual dramas. The director Trevor Nunn, talking about performing the plays in sequence, has called them "the first box set", evoking the familiar modern idea of a narrative serial in which each episode traces both a self-contained story and a contribution to a larger story-telling arc (Nunn 2015). A reader of Shakespeare's Folio, therefore, is implicitly encouraged to binge-read the history plays, consuming them like a modern serial

narrative in which the end of an episode is only provisional, and the narrative satisfaction and consumer pleasure of the engagement is achieved through completion. In this narrative, Bosworth field, where Richmond defeats Richard III, is the early modern series finale, where the episodic narrative goes out on a dramatic high.

In her book *Consuming Pleasures*, Jennifer Hayward locates a shared morphology of serial fictions from Dickens to soap opera, but her list of these features could well encompass Shakespeare's history plays too:

> A serial is, by definition, an ongoing narrative released in successive parts. In addition to these defining qualities, serial narratives share elements that might be termed, after Wittgenstein, "family resemblances". These include refusal of closure; intertwined subplots; large casts of characters (incorporating a diverse range of age, gender, class, and, increasingly, race representation to attract a similarly diverse audience); interaction with current political, social, or cultural issues; dependence on profit; and acknowledgment of audience response (this has become increasingly explicit, even institutionalised within the form, over time). (Hayward 1997, 3)

Those large casts, topical references, ongoing dynastic and political narratives, and the engagement with audience enjoyment via the popular serial character of Falstaff, all resonate with Shakespeare's histories. And ever since the beginning of the twentieth century, although not before, it has been relatively common to perform Shakespeare's history plays in sequences, often the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, or *Richard II* and *Henry IV* – or both. More recent examples on stage include the English Shakespeare Company directed by Michael Bogdanov during the 1980s, and the Histories Cycle directed by Michael Boyd for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2006-8; the medium has been appropriate for television, the home of the modern serial too, in serialisations such as *An Age of Kings* in 1960 (Smith 2007) or the BBC series *The Hollow Crown* (2012-16 [Földváry, 2020]). Such large-scale theatrical enterprises have often marked commemorations or anniversaries, such as John Barton and Terry Hands' *The Wars of the Roses* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon in the Shakespeare tercentenary year of 1964.

Serial understanding of the history plays has become a theatrical norm – and, to a large extent, a critical one too. As Amy Lidster points out in her account of history play publication, the Folio catalogue is "a retrospective division propelled by the publication process – and specifically by *this* publication venture, which has had an immense (and sometimes unproductive) influence on critical approaches to early modern history plays" (Lidster 2022, 1). Lidster emphasises that the Folio division does not reflect some pre-existing essence of these particular plays: rather, it "offers a *reading* of them, and its construction reflects the interests and strategies of those who took part in its publication" (1). It is a reading that has been hard to escape. From E. M. W. Tillyard's influential idea of the Tudor myth (Tillyard 1944) to Jan Kott's parable of historical circularity in which "every Shakespearian act is merely a repetition" (Kott 1964, 9), criticism has tended to find meaning in the sequence rather than the individual plays.

In this article I want to re-establish the Folio ordering of the history plays as a specific intervention, not a natural reflection of authorial intention or readerly expectation. By undoing the assumptions of serial reading, it is possible to return the history plays to a pre-Folio existence in which individual plays can speak more loudly than the series, and other voices can join the depiction of English history. I emphasise some of the counterevidence showing how early modern readers encountered Shakespeare's history plays before the First Folio, arguing that they were differently popular, and popular severally rather than serially. To put it another way, the history plays were not consumed by early readers as equally significant episodes in a wider narrative; they were a collection of plays some of which were better – more enjoyable, satisfying, resonant – than others. Readers encountered these works grouped together with other plays rather than within this narrow authorial and historical sequence. My focus is on reading plays in print rather than in the experience of the theatre, although what we know of the performance schedules and repertory of the early modern stage would seem to confirm the autonomy of the individual plays over the anachronistic Folio sequence.

Print History prior to the Folio

In prioritising historical chronology, the Folio's order entirely dispenses with any sense of authorial chronology. Figure 1 compares the Folio order of plays with what we understand of their order of composition.

Folio order	**Putative order of composition/performance**
King John	*2 Henry VI*
Richard II	*3 Henry VI*
1 Henry IV	*1 Henry VI*
2 Henry IV	*Richard III*
Henry V	*Richard II*
1 Henry VI	*King John*
2 Henry VI	*1 Henry IV*
3 Henry VI	*2 Henry IV*
Richard III	*Henry V*
Henry VIII	*Henry VIII*

Fig. 1.

The right hand column does suggest that there are some internal sequences – the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, for instance – but it does not, of course, take account of the other plays Shakespeare was writing in the meantime. The Oxford Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1986) – the first modern complete works to dispense with the Folio organisation and attempt to present the plays in chronological order – places *Titus Andronicus* between the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* between the two Henry IV plays, and *Much Ado About Nothing* between them and *Henry V*. Both in terms of the order of composition, and in terms of plays of other genres that are interspersed across the decade, that's to say, the histories do not form a coherent sequence.

These discontinuities are amplified when looking at the pre-Folio print existence of the history plays, as in Figure 2.

Folio play	Pre-Folio print existence
King John	Not printed, although *The Troublesome Reign* (1591) is related, and Q2 (1611) attributed to "W.Sh."
Richard II	5 editions, all called "tragedy"
1 Henry IV	6 editions, "The History of Henry IV"
2 Henry IV	1 edition as "The Second part of Henry IV"
Henry V	3 editions
1 Henry VI	Not printed
2 Henry VI	2 editions as "The First Part of the Contention"
3 Henry VI	2 editions as "The True Tragedie"
Richard III	6 editions, all "tragedy"
Henry VIII	Not printed

Fig. 2.

In part this pre-Folio publication history attests to the popularity of history as a genre during the 1590s and beyond. Shakespeare's history plays are the most reprinted of his dramatic works. But it also highlights distinct patterns of marketing and, by implication, consumption that emphasise the autonomous enjoyment of individual playbooks rather than their place in a putative sequence.

We can see this by comparing those history playbooks with titles suggesting that they are part of a series with those that emphasise singularity and completeness. The two most reprinted texts, *Richard II* and *Richard III*, are each titled as tragedies in their Quarto forms. This genre is heavily end-stopped: it does not easily generate sequels, nor the expectation of a sequel. Where a tragedy is part of a larger implied narrative it usually provides the conclusion (as in *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York*, the second part of *The First Part of the Contention*). Thus, Marston's sequel to his *Antonio and Mellida* is the tragedy *Antonio's Revenge*; the anonymous *First Part of Jeronimo* provides a prequel to the popular *The Spanish Tragedy*. In these examples, tragedy provides the concluding episode. More commonly, tragedies are standalone dramas, where a sequel is a ludicrous thought. The retitling of these plays into "The Life and Death of" in the Folio presents the individual lifespan not as a tragic

arc – where there is nothing afterwards – but an historical one – where the next king rises by the demise of his predecessor.

Others of the Quarto history plays not designated as tragedies are also titled in ways that emphasise their aesthetic and historical autonomy. Perhaps most striking is the play the Folio retitles *3 Henry VI*, which appears in Quarto form in 1595 with the title *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke, and the death of good King Henrie the Sixt, with the whole contention betweene the two Houses Lancaster and Yorke*. The double emphasis of tragedy and 'whole contention' identifies this as a distinctly standalone play title. When Thomas Pavier and William Jaggard published their series of playbooks in 1619, this subtitle was redeployed to introduce a double edition of both parts of the play, more properly deserving of the title *The Whole Contention betweene the two Famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke*. The Pavier Quartos carried separate half titles for the two parts "The first part of the Contention of the two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster" and "The Second Part. Containing the Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke". While Nicholas Grene argues for a sequence of four historical plays on Henry VI and Richard III, "planned as an interlocking series with a narrative rhythm building across the parts rather than in the individual plays" (Grene 2002, 23), this was certainly not available to, nor seen as important or marketable to, readers. Part one was never printed in Quarto form; part two was proposed as a first part to an incomplete story; part three presented itself as entire and complete; *Richard III* was much reprinted as a solo tragedy (from 1597 onwards).

Only two Quarto publications of Shakespeare's historical plays suggest that they are part, rather than whole, and that they are therefore dependent on other books or episodes for their narrative completion. *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, wit the death of the good Duke Humphrey* (1594, reprinted in the Folio as *2 Henry VI*) implies that there will be a second, and perhaps even subsequent, parts. (In fact, as we have seen, the sequel actually subverts these expectations, claiming for itself the status of the 'whole contention' between the Lancastrian and Yorkist claims.) Nevertheless, it could be argued that a part one has more autonomy than a part two: the former suggests the reader has begun at the beginning; the latter that she or he has missed a

crucial first step. This may be relevant for the other distinctly serial play: *The Second part of Henrie the fourth, continuing to his death, and coronation of Henrie the fift* (1600). "Second part" and "continuing" both identify this play as the sequel to the prior part, the play called in the Folio "The First Part of King Henry the fourth". Most significant of all is the fact that this serial play, following on from the print popularity of the first part, seems to have made such a little impact on the market. The many readers who generated the sales that supported multiple editions of part one did not, apparently, do the same with the sequel. Part two is the sole Shakespeare's history play published in Quarto to have only a single edition.

2 Henry IV was not, therefore, a narrative or acquisitive necessity for those who had enjoyed the previous instalment (were there Elizabethan completists of that sort?). Indeed, it does not even seem to have succeeded in retrospectively recasting that first play *as* an instalment, since its publication does not modify the title of the previous episode until the Folio. The reprinted Quarto texts of *Henry IV* continue to be called *The History of Henrie the Fourth*. That's to say, part two is titled in the manner of a modern cinematic sequel (for comparison, see for example *Airplane II: The Sequel* [1982] or *Legally Blonde 2* [2003], etc. The unexpected prominence of roman numerals to signal a film sequel may be obliquely Shakespearean in origin, although roman numerals for the monarchs' reigns, and for the numbers of their parts, comes in with a later classicising editorial tradition. The Folio spells out these numbers in words.) The analogy with the cinematic sequel clarifies that this is different from those serial films that function as the second half of a narrative divided into two or more. In modern cinema, such episodic films do not tend to be numbered, but rather titled: e.g., *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002), and *The Return of the King* (2003) for Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The sequel essentially reruns the commercially successful original which has left an ambiguous or somehow contingent ending that can be unpicked for a continuation. By contrast, part two completes a story shaped into a double episode.

For Shakespeare's historical plays on the reign of Henry IV, it is hard to argue that a further play was not always intended from the

outset. The promise of the Prince's "reformation" is anticipated in his soliloquy at the end of I.ii of part one; his inevitable reckoning with Falstaff is flagged up in their exchange in II.iv: "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world"; "I do, I will". The Queen's Men's play *The Famous Victories of Henry V* combined an account of Prince Henry's prodigal years with his accession to the throne and his victory over the French: perhaps a second part of Shakespeare's play might have been expected to cover similar ground. Looking at the source material, and reviewing the content of both *2 Henry IV* and *Henry* V, it seems plausible to think that this reveals that the original plan for a single sequel play was strategically dilated into two sequels. The extension – for some critics, the stretching somewhat thin – of this material across two sequel plays seems to be less about the historical events that need to be covered, and rather a response to the extraordinary success of the distinctly ahistorical character of Falstaff.

In fact, Falstaff's star persona both shapes and challenges the primacy of historical material in creating the serial, offering an alternative narrative arc that Harold Bloom calls "the Falstaffiad" (Bloom 1998, 249). A glance at these Falstaff plays in print gives more insight into the creation of this counter-sequence. The *Historie of Henrie the Fourth* (1598) is advertised with a plug for the fat knight, drawing on the contemporary popularity of "humours" comedies: "with the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe". (The Stationers' Register entry for this play had used a different, less fashionable phrase: "the conceipted mirth of Sir John Falstaff".) Part two does the same, placing Falstaff in a separate, prominent section on its titlepage: "With the humours of Sir John Falstaffe, and swaggering Pistoll". Henry V picks up some of the theme, offering "with his battell fought at Agin Court in France. Togither with Auntient Pistoll". But an alternative conclusion to this trilogy (Bloom does not, however, admit this into his version of the Falstaffiad) can be found in the publication of a different play: *A Most plesaunt and excellent conceited Comedie, of Syr John Falstaffe, and the merrie Wives of Windsor* (1602). In Quarto *Merry Wives*, Falstaff reaches his title-page apotheosis in having the play named for him, rather than being an additional attraction. This can be seen as a topical marketing device drawing this play into a sequence with the

reprinted editions of Henry IV. It is surely significant that, outside the genre of English history, the retitling of this play into *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is one of the Folio's most prominent editorial interventions. It looks rather as if the Folio text is invested in policing the borders between history and comedy more actively, producing its particular and emphatic historical narrative by reallocating adjacent material and suppressing its echoes. Placing the renamed *Merry Wives of Windsor* among the comedies, just like reallocating plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*, drawing on ancient or classical historical sources, into tragedies, shows that the history play genre as presented in 1623 is a specific and critically invested act of generic hygiene.

Authorship and Other History Plays

Just as the editorial arrangement of plays in the First Folio prioritises and, in so doing, constructs genre, so too, of course, it establishes a distinctly authorial canon. Arguably, for the first time, Shakespeare's plays are presented and consumed within the framework of his authorship: the edition innovates, and then immediately naturalises, the reading of its plays in the context of other plays by the same author. But the dramatic engagement with medieval English history, on the early modern stage and in print, extended far beyond Shakespeare's authorship.

Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson's catalogue *British Drama* lists titles of numerous extant and lost plays during the 1590s that are connected with chronicle and popular history of the Middle Ages. These include *James IV*, *The life and Death of Jack Straw*, *King Edward I*, *Harry of Cornwall*, *Buckingham*, *Longshanks*, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *Edmund Ironside*, *The Life and Death of Harry I*, *1* and *2 Robin Hood*, *A Comedy of the King of England's Son and the King of Scotland's Son*, *The Famous Wars of Henry I*, *Pierce of Exton*, *1* and *2 Henry Richmond*, *1* and *2 King Edward IV* and *Sir John Oldcastle* (Wiggins and Richardson 2011-18). Some of these titles suggest at least the nominal organisation of a play from historical sources around the person of the monarch, and are named, like Shakespeare's Folio plays, for kings. But others are named for different historical actors, such as two plays taken from the same

historical period as Shakespeare's *Richard II*: *Pierce of Exton* (Richard's murderer) and *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* (the story of the leader of the Peasants' Revolt). These plays, emphasising non-regal historical personages, resonate with the original Quarto titles of many of Shakespeare's history plays, which emphasise a range of characters beyond the monarch. *Henry IV*, for instance, mentions "Harry Percy" and Falstaff as well as the king himself; *The First Part of the Contention* names Duke Humphrey, the Duke of Suffolk, the Cardinal of Winchester, Jack Cade, and the Duke of York on its extended crowded title. Like Shakespeare's plays, some of these other history plays seem to be serial or two-part: there are double plays on Robin Hood, on Henry Richmond, and on Edward IV, for example. There are thus immediate similarities in the scope, titling, and presentation of Shakespeare's Quarto history plays with other plays in the same period.

Medieval English history was a staple of 1590s theatre, to an extent which far exceeded any single author canon. The engagement of audiences – on the stage or in print – might well have read across these authors to connect historical fictions in different modes and styles. The printing of the old Queen's Men's play *The Famous Victories of Henry V* in 1598 was probably an attempt to cash in on the popularity of *Henry IV* published the same year. The publication of Shakespeare's own *Henry V* play in 1600 emphasises parallels with, rather than differentiates itself from, its predecessor: both versions of Henry V's kingly successes name Agincourt on their titlepage. Tara L. Lyons' excellent analysis of play marketing and collections before the Folio reminds us that, even when Shakespeare's name was attached to his works in Quarto (not at all for *Henry V*, and not until 1619 for the *Contention* plays), "we should assume neither that it was prioritized as a principle of collection nor that his authorship inspired the consolidation of his printed plays in the hands of publishing agents and readers" (Lyons 2012, 187-88). Keen playbook buyers at the end of the 1590s, therefore, with a taste for historical drama, might well have been as interested in *The Famous Victories* as they were in *2 Henry IV*: and that episode shaped their understanding and recognition of Henry V when he returned in Shakespeare's own (but unattributed) play of that name. Similarly, the Chamberlain's

Men's depiction of Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays, originally named Sir John Oldcastle but changed, presumably at the demand of the influential Cobham family, the modern descendants of the proto-Protestant martyr, is in dialogue with the Admiral's Men's altogether more reverential *Sir John Oldcastle* (published in 1600). A second part of this drama was apparently commissioned, according to Henslowe's diary, but is not extant: the 1600 Quarto carries the title *The first part Of the true and honorable historie, of the life of Sir John Old-castle the good Lord Cobham*. Clearly, historical source material lends itself to paired serial or sequel plays.

Richard II is further example of a play that may have been understood in the context of another historical drama not by Shakespeare. Indeed, the earliest printed texts of the play seem to show a specific indebtedness to another retelling of an earlier part of the historical story. This untitled manuscript play is often known as "Thomas of Woodstock", after its central protagonist, Thomas, 1st Duke of Gloucester, and it may have provided audiences with some background to events that otherwise seem mysterious at the start of Shakespeare's own *Richard II*. Shakespeare begins with the altercation between Mowbray and Bolingbroke about the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. The matter cannot be reconciled and the combat between the noblemen is deferred. Much later in the play, the question of Gloucester's death is still unresolved: Bolingbroke interrogates Bagot and Fitzwater about "what thou dost know of noble Gloucester's death", and they in turn accuse Aumerle (IV.i.1-40).

There is, of course, a *Realpolitik* at play here. The suspicion is that Richard himself is culpable for his uncle's death, but neither the characters nor the play seems quite to dare to say so: in a drama finely balanced about the justification for Richard's overthrow, this is a whisper rather than a direct accusation. At a more thematic level, this mystery about the past is the condition of history itself: Gloucester's murder is a moment of historiographical self-consciousness, or metahistory, where the past refuses to give up its secrets and is instead a discursive space for competing interpretations. By beginning the sequence with *Richard II*, a serialist reading of the histories suggests that the prior history of these characters is unreachable.

But there may be a practical explanation for the evasiveness of *Richard II* on the question of Gloucester's murder: the existence of a prior play on precisely this topic. The play of Thomas of Woodstock is all about the events that led up to the death of Thomas, and perhaps Shakespeare's own play expects that some audiences may well be aware of this prior story. A significant reading in the Quartos gives glancing support to this hypothesis. Throughout *Richard II*, Richard's dead uncle is called "Gloucester". But in all the Quartos from 1597 to 1615 (five editions), John of Gaunt is introduced regretting "the part I had in Woodstockes bloud" (1597, sig. B). In the Folio this is changed: "the part I had in Glousters blood". It's as if the Folio, implicitly designating *Richard II* as the start of its own historical sequence, has to erase a reference to something that came before, even though the play is deeply dependent on versions of its own lost past. The historical sequence has to begin somewhere, but that very beginning bases the sequence on a disavowal of its own logic, the continuity and connectedness of historical events.

Relatedly, later critical responses to the play of Thomas of Woodstock have tended to make a claim for it by claiming Shakespeare's authorship (Egan 2006), or to retitle it to imply such proximity. The titles of modern editions – including from the Malone Society *The First Part of the Reign of King Richard II or Thomas of Woodstock* (Frijlinck 1929) and in the Revels Plays series *Thomas of Woodstock: or, Richard II, Part One* (Corbin and Sedge 2002) – demonstrate the epistemological hold of the Folio's history sequence in their own renaming.

If the Folio list severs Shakespeare's plays from the wider culture of historical drama in the 1590s, it also involves prioritising a slightly smaller subset of plays that conform to serial expectation. The tactical suppression or omission of both the first and the last play in the list is commonplace: as historical singletons cut loose from the wider narrative, both *King John* and *Henry VIII* have tended to be ignored in critical discussions of Shakespeare's English histories, and they are similarly exiled from the twentieth-century traditions of serial performance. Nicholas Grene's book *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* is typical in simply "leaving out the non-serial *King John* and the later *Henry VIII*" (2002, 9). The recent

tendency to retitle *Henry VIII*, following contemporary allusions but not the Folio, as "All Is True", as in *The New Oxford Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 2016), completes this separation by giving the play a title more akin to comedy than history. What is 'wrong' with these plays is not their generic shape or their use of their source materials – in those ways they correspond closely with the other historical plays. Rather, they are outliers chronologically in a genre that has been thoroughly reconceptualised as serial in narrative form. It is an organisational anomaly that the Folio sequence both constructs (through its retitling and reordering) and then has to work to sustain (by ignoring the limit cases). The Folio gives us 'history' as a category, but scholarship has tended to focus on a smaller number of plays than this constitutive group.

If the first and last Folio history plays have been squeezed out of a genre heavily invested in chronological and narrative sequence, so too has another Shakespearean history play. *Edward III*, despite being "materially accepted in the canon as a collaborative work" (Kirwan 2015, 153), is now routinely included in late twentieth-century complete works editions published by Oxford, Norton, and Arden Shakespeare series, but much less evident in critical accounts of Shakespeare's historical drama. The dominance of the Folio sequence means that this historically contiguous play – Richard II succeeded Edward – has nevertheless struggled to find its place in the critical conversation. A sequence of Shakespeare's history plays that began with the French wars of Edward III and the capture of Calais would establish some very different themes, locations, and understandings of the nation, not least a different role for women in political life, than the established sequence beginning with, and implicitly endorsing, Richard II's own martyrology: it is a fascinating counterfactual to think how the Shakespearean history play might look if it began with *Edward III* rather than *Richard II*. The failure of *Edward III* to find a place among the history plays thus reveals something about the critical investment in certain models of Shakespearean history. Recent investigations into the extent of Shakespeare's collaborative writing offers a more general challenge to the serialists: much recent work would suggest that all three *Henry VI* plays, as well as *Henry VIII*, are jointly authored. And while collaborative composition is not

necessarily incompatible with serial organisation, there is, nevertheless, an assumption that authorship and seriality are connected. The interconnectedness of Shakespeare's history plays with wider historical drama in the period is one of the critical losses occasioned by the Folio's organisation, and has distorted analyses of these plays in their larger context.

Early Modern Collections

The Falstaffian trilogy, ending not with Falstaff's overdetermined absence from *Henry V*, but with his central role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, offers a kind of alternative sequence not confined to those plays the Folio designates as histories. Other early collections of playbooks – both those created by individual readers organising their libraries, and in the proto-collection published by Thomas Pavier and William Jaggard in 1619 – build on this possibility, and show that organisation by genre, or by historical chronology, or even by author, was not standard or inevitable to early buyers and readers.

The set of plays published under mysterious circumstances in 1619 by Thomas Pavier and William Jaggard are traditionally known as the Pavier Quartos, but recently renamed the Jaggard Quartos by Zachary Lesser (Lesser 2021, 78). Ten plays were printed in nine volumes, with a particular preponderance of history plays, most probably because these were the bestsellers of Shakespeare's Quarto back-catalogue. The printing project seems to have begun with the aim of producing a serial edition: the copy of *The First Part of the Contention* and *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York* was presented under the unifying title *The Whole Contention betweene the two Famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke*. Half titles split the drama into "The first part of the Contention of the two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the death of the good Duke Humfrey" (A2) and "The Second Part. Containing the Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke, and the good King Henrie the Sixt" (I). Most significantly, the signature numbers are continuous, and a third text, *Pericles*, completes a set of three, beginning with Gower's entrance at sig. R. As Lesser observes, many library catalogues list this edition under the heading of *Whole Contention*,

considering it part of the same single title, and there are several extant copies with these plays bound together (Lesser 2021, 37; Shakespeare Census n.d.). This Pavier/Jaggard serial begins like a historical narrative but then moves to something different: two plays on medieval history are yoked to a medieval poet, Gower, who opens a play based on his own *Confessio Amantis*.

For whatever reason, rest of the Pavier/Jaggard Quartos did not continue with this serial impulse. Nor were the selection entirely Shakespearean: *Sir John Oldcastle*, the Admiral's Men's play discussed earlier as part of the larger landscape of medieval history plays, was reprinted in 1619. Like other of these reprints, *Sir John Oldcastle* bore a false date, 1600, perhaps to pass copies off as part of the initial Quarto printing of that year. But unlike the other plays in the same category, Pavier and Jaggard reattribute the play in the course of reprinting it (so the titlepage is not, in fact, the same as the earlier edition it mimics). The 1619 edition of the play adds "Written by William Shakespeare" to the titlepage. Another non-Shakespearean or apocryphal play that was included in the collection was *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, first printed in 1608 with an attribution to Shakespeare both on the titlepage and in the Stationers' Register entry. The 1619 edition repeated this authorship claim.

There is no consensus about what Pavier/Jaggard were trying to achieve with their 1619 project, but A. W. Pollard's then-influential view that these were simply unauthorised and pirated editions now seems implausible, not least because Jaggard was given the commission to produce the Folio only a few years later (Pollard 1920). But this curious part-collection, initially apparently planned as a serial with continuous signatures, is neither a historical sequence nor an entirely comfortable authorial one. Although the reattribution of *Sir John Oldcastle* may suggest an attempt to reconcile its authorial coherence, the inclusion of *Pericles* and the *Contention* plays, all of which are collaborative (which may possibly be why *Pericles* was not included in the 1623 Folio), compromises any such order. The other plays included in this group of reprints were *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V*. Lesser's fascinating recent work on this collection also reveals that Thomas Heywood's play *A*

Woman Killed with Kindness seems to have been part of some of the early collections of Pavier/Jaggard Quartos, including the so-called Miss Orlebar copy, now in the Folger Shakespeare Library. A manuscript table of contents has survived from this now disbanded collection, listing *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as the first play in the volume, followed by a mini-sequence of *Henry V* and *The Whole Contention* (Lesser 2021, 60-62). *Pericles*, which, as discussed, was printed as if it would follow immediately from *The Whole Contention*, is separated from these plays in the Orlebar binding. What Lesser's extensive examination of extant Pavier/Jaggard Quartos reveals, however, is that the main intention behind their publication was to "creat[e] a group of quartos that could be sold as a bound set" (66).

This pre-Folio serial or collected publication offers an entirely different narrative and reader experience from the organisation of history plays in the Folio. Sonia Massai's argument that Pavier and Jaggard were working to "whet, rather than satisfy, readers' demand for a new collection of Shakespeare's dramatic works" (Massai 2007, 107-8) suggests that this collection of Quartos was a proof of business concept for the more ambitious First Folio publication: a "pre-publicity stunt", as she puts it (119). If so, its completely different organisational principles underscore, and denaturalise, the specific editorial intervention made in the Folio's catalogue sequence.

Other evidence about how readers collected individual play Quartos and bound them into collections or *sammelbände* is scattered but points in the same direction: that the Folio collection by genre in general, and by historical chronology for the history plays in particular, was the exception rather than the norm. A commonplace book belonging to Sir John Harington lists volumes of his playbooks (those volumes have since been lost or disbound) gathered into collections of between eleven and thirteen plays. These lists show a preference for volumes as miscellanies, filled with works in different genres and by different authors. One indicative volume, for instance, includes *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet* alongside Jonson's *Sejanus* and *Every Man in His Humour* and Chapman's *Monsieur D'Olive*. It also suggests a mini historical cluster: the two parts of *Henry IV* and then *Richard III* (Harington's

Richard II, which might have been expected here, is in another volume with *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Volpone*, and *The Spanish Tragedy* [Greg 1962]).

Harington's apparent sense that the two parts of *Henry IV* made sense together in the same volume was shared by other readers: the Shakespeare Census reports copies at the Hunterian in Glasgow, in Princeton University Library, and at the Folger which bind them together. There are apparently no extant volumes which include *Henry V* as part of the sequence (Shakespeare Census n.d.). But there are other collecting and grouping possibilities too. A volume at the Newberry Library binds the two parts of the *Contention* (what the Folio calls *Henry VI Part 2* and *3*) together with *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Sir John Oldcastle*. Because so many Shakespeare Quartos have been disbound from earlier collections, it is hard to reconstruct their place in early libraries, but the surviving copies suggest that the Folio's organisation by author, or by genre, or by historical sequence, was not already available, desirable, or necessary for readers.

Conclusion

Many aspects of the Folio's hold on Shakespeare studies have been challenged in recent decades. That the earlier Quartos were, as John Heminges and Henry Condell put it in their prefatory letter "To the Great Variety of Readers", "maimed, and deformed, by the frauds and stealthes of injurious imposters" (Shakespeare 1623, sig. A3) has been interrogated and largely rejected as an adequate account of the variants between Quarto and Folio texts. Similarly, their claim that the Folio represented Shakespeare's entire canon, "absolute in their numbers", has also come to be seen as a sales pitch rather than an authoritative account, as *Pericles*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and numerous other parts of plays from *Arden of Faversham* to "Sir Thomas More" are increasingly seen as part of the canon. That the history plays are best understood – perhaps even, implicitly, were *intended* – as a sequence is one claim of the Folio that is ripe for reassessment. The prior textual lives of these plays, and their use by early readers, show that seriality was not inevitable or necessary then, and should not be now.

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